

## **Fontana History of Germany 1780-1918.**

### **The Long Nineteenth Century – David Blackbourn**

This is a summary of his answer to the question as to how and why Germany was united between 1862 and 1871.

Firstly, he takes for granted the basic summary of events. He then tries to look at the world picture of these years before analysing the role of Bismarck.

He sees in Japan another successful revolution from above in creating a modernising state. In the USA a civil war is won by the economically advanced North. In addition and linked to events in Germany was the successful unification of Italy.

Germany was united as the result of three wars. Why did the Great Powers allow this to come about?

1. No choice due to the success of Prussian arms *“it cannot be emphasised to much that unification was, in the last resort, achieved on the battlefield.”*
2. Russia was suffering the consequences of defeat in the Crimean War, and was absorbed in the 1860s in a bout of internal reform. Russian industrialisation depended on good relations with Germany particularly Prussia. Prussia was already favoured through staying out of the Crimean War. Bismarck encouraged Russian friendship with the Alvensleben Convention in 1863 supporting Russian suppression of a Polish revolt.
3. Britain was preoccupied with colonial problems and was as ever suspicious of French intentions in Europe. Germany appeared to neither threaten British general interests nor possess a navy. In addition British Liberals led by Gladstone favoured national self determination as in Italy. Finally, there were always more pressing domestic questions.
4. The main characteristic of Austria was its isolation and weakness having lost Russian support in the Crimean War. In addition, Austria's real ally against French claims within the Confederation was Prussia who was also her rival. Moreover, Austria had a permanent nationalities problem with the demands of the Hungarians, Italians, Slavs and Czechs.

5. Finally there was Louis Napoleon's France ever restless and eager to gain some advantage in Europe *"that excited universal suspicion and found none to mourn its fate in 1870"*.

These factors have also to be understood in the context of a *"a period of uncertainty in international relations, a diplomatic interregnum between the breakdown of one system and the advent of another. The equilibrium of the Concert of Europe, based on dynastic legitimacy and the status quo, had disappeared in the Crimea. A new system based on the legitimacy of nation states ... had yet to emerge."*

Blackbourn argues that unification under Prussia was not inevitable in the eyes of contemporaries but that more than just the international situation made it likely.

*"Resources and circumstances (meant) Prussia was always likely to come out on top"*.

1. Austria not only had chronic financial problems but also Prussia was growing faster. Prussia's national income grew twice as fast as Austria's between the 1780s and 1850. In 1865 Prussia possessed 15,000 trains with a horsepower of 800,000, Austria just 3,400 with a horsepower of 100,000.
2. Prussia's transport links made access to Prussian markets essential for the smaller German states whatever their sympathies and gave Prussia a decisive advantage within the Zollverein.
3. Prussia's dynamism and leadership of the Zollverein helped encourage nationalism amongst the growing middle classes who increasingly accepted Prussia as the alternative to stagnation. The German National Association, which supported Prussia, had 25,000 members while the Austrian equivalent only 1500.

In these circumstances, Blackbourn goes on to assess the role of Bismarck. He quotes Bismarck's views on the role of the statesman:

*"Man cannot create or control the tide of time, he can only move in the same direction and try to direct it."*

Yet Blackbourn believes that Bismarck saw himself as "God's chosen instrument" a man with a destiny. In addition, he points out that although Bismarck appeared to be a typical conservative Prussian landowner he was always more than that; he had an up to date understanding of the new economic forces *"double entry book keeping and chemical studies"* that were shaping Germany. Equally he recognised that Prussia and Austria were

set on a collision course. It was not simply his view of the inevitability of conflict but his scorn for the Confederation that made him appear quite radical to conservatives. This was made worse by his, quite openly, arguing that the nationalists should be used and the moderate middle classes encouraged. Thus in Blackbourn's view Bismarck was the "wild man" of Prussian politics whose appointment in 1862 can be seen as a gamble.

Blackbourn dismisses any idea of Bismarck having a master plan but argues that the "*chief characteristics of his policy were flexibility and the skilful exploitation of opportunities.*" He argues that Bismarck was only consistent in his policy towards Austria seeing the Gastein Convention as no more than a truce. As to the war with France he concludes along with most historians that Louis Napoleon was to blame and that claims to the contrary were the product of Bismarck's later boasting of his own cleverness.

Finally, Blackbourn discusses the domestic dimension of Bismarck's policies. He concludes that Bismarck merely "flirted" with public opinion and was an "*intelligent and flexible conservative, very aware of liberal-nationalist demands and prepared to play with fire to preserve the essentials of the Prussian military monarchy.*"

Extras. How important were railways and logistics in the wars of unification? A military historian's interpretation.  
Martin Van Creveld "Supplying War"

## How important were economic factors in the unification of Germany?

<p><b>The unification of Germany was the result of several different causes.</b></p> <p>Economic factors were however crucial in developing the military strength of Prussia that Bismarck was to exploit so successfully. Yet even Bismarck had to depend on the King, the Minister of War and the soldiers. Finally mistakes of Louis Napoleon and the whole complex whirl of diplomacy was part of a world that Bismarck could only exploit but not control.</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>First sentence addresses the issue in the question. Then lists the main points of the answer.</p>
<p>The growth of the Prussian economy was the essential prerequisite for the process of unification. Without the increased tax revenues from a growing economy to pay for a bigger and better army Bismarck's wars could not have been fought successfully. The development of coal, iron and steel industries and an efficient rail transport network provided the sinews of a successful war economy. These in turn had grown as a consequence of the Zollverein, the customs union that permitted the growth of free trade within the Confederation but excluding Austria. A further consequence of economic growth was the spreading awareness that cooperation and possible German unity was the route to prosperity. This stimulus to nationalism was used by Bismarck to show the benefits of cooperating with Prussia rather than Austria.</p>	<p>Main factor in the question dealt with first.</p> <p><b>Look for extra facts you can add to illustrate economic growth</b></p>
<p>Economic change also began to change the European balance of power in the 1850s –as Prussia grew more powerful Austria grew weaker. However not all such changes were due to economics; Austria also grew weaker through losing its bloody war to hold onto its Italian possessions. Moreover its support of Britain, France and Turkey in the Crimea forfeited any future Russian support. The balance that had helped conserve the Confederation was becoming shaky especially given Louis Napoleon's willingness to assert French interests to increase his popularity at home. His support for Italian unification clearly showed that the French were not committed to the frontiers agreed in 1815.</p>	<p>Link to the changing balance of power Austria</p> <p>France</p>
<p><b>However</b> neither the changing economic situation or the developments in diplomacy could have brought about unification without the statesmanship of Bismarck. How far he planned each move can be debated, but not the fact of the moves and their results. He understood the changed position of Prussia in 1862 and was able to take advantage of all the opportunities that arose to pursue his aims of uniting Germany under Prussia and preserving the power of the King and the aristocracy. Danish claims to Schleswig and Holstein allowed him both to win over some of his bitter enemies among the National Liberals and after victory, place Austria in a false position in Holstein such that he could provoke a quarrel at a time of his own choosing.</p>	<p>Start analysis of the role of Bismarck</p> <p>Aims</p> <p>Denmark</p>
<p>For Prussia to unite Germany Austria would have to be defeated. Bismarck skilfully used offers of compensation in the Rhineland to ensure French neutrality- though whether the meeting in Biarritz actually took place is open to doubt. Just as plausibly Louis Napoleon was simply encouraging Prussia and Austria to exhaust themselves in war thus allowing France to walk into the Rhineland unopposed. How far Bismarck actually gained Russian neutrality by</p>	<p>Note that each of these points on the diplomatic isolation of Austria can be expanded.</p>

the offer of help in suppressing a Polish rebellion has also been doubted. He may have been more concerned about the danger of Polish nationalism in East Prussia. However the secret offensive alliance with Italy was a carefully planned move to provoke Austria into mobilising and so make Prussia's moves appear defensive. Finally, in the build up to war there can be no doubt that Bismarck manoeuvred Austria into declaring war.	
The rapid victory was followed by a lenient and equally rapid peace to avoid an Austrian war of revenge and to counter French military moves. Revealing French intentions to the South German states made a defensive alliance with Prussia's North German Confederation a rational response. It then remained to find a way of provoking France into declaring a war that Prussia and its allies would win. Louis Napoleon's unsuccessful efforts – Mexico, the attempt to buy Luxembourg - to win domestic popularity through foreign policy success increased the pressure on him.	Start build up to Franco Prussian war  Pressure on Louis Napoleon
France was also diplomatically isolated. The Italian government was aware that a Franco – Prussian war would force the French to remove troops from Rome where they protected the Pope. The Russians were aware that the defeat of France would allow them to expand their fleet in the Black Sea as Britain would not stop them without France. In addition the British were intensely suspicious of French intentions in the Low Countries. All these suspicions were played on by Bismarck to isolate France.	Isolation of France
The Hohenzollern candidacy for the empty throne of Spain was the final straw. Although the candidate was withdrawn French nationalist demands forced Louis Napoleon to demand that such a situation should never again arise. Bismarck's editing of the infamous Ems telegram was sufficient to provoke French mobilisation and a declaration of war. Prussia and its allies won rapidly and Bismarck was able to exploit nationalist euphoria to push through agreement to create a German Empire under the King of Prussia.	Hohenzollern Candidacy  Note the summary of the Ems telegram affair
Although there can be no doubt of the importance of Bismarck we have already seen that the economic and diplomatic situation was not of his making. Equally he would not have achieved much without the support of the King, Wilhelm, nor without the army created by Von Roon and led to victory by Von Moltke. The wars against France and Austria had been won partly as a result of skilled manoeuvre and superior weapons and training for which these men were responsible. An ailing Louis Napoleon also made mistakes, the Mexican affair, the attempt to purchase Luxembourg, and in allowing his country to become isolated and fall into Bismarck's snares. A similar comment might be made about Austrian policy before 1866. Equally the spread of nationalist feeling which Bismarck was able to exploit had causes that began well before he came to power.	Note how this short summary emphasis that the key argument against the claim that economic factors were decisive is the role of Bismarck.
In conclusion, this essay has demonstrated that the economic changes in Prussia played a vital part in creating the circumstances that made unification possible but that more was needed in particular the statesmanship of Bismarck without which unification might not have occurred.	Conclusion: largely repeats the introduction.



**Compare the importance of individual political figures with the role of economic forces in the successful unification of Germany.**

<p><i><b>Introduction:</b> Make clear <b>who</b> you are going to write about, the central role of Bismarck, Louis Napoleon, Wilhelm, Von Moltke, Von Roon, the rulers of Austria-Hungary. Key economic forces, the Zollverein, economic growth of Prussia, the way in which this spread nationalism, the importance of the railways.</i></p>	
<p><i>Major section where you must demonstrate B's importance. 1. 1862-4 Constitutional crisis, and war with Denmark. B wins over the Liberal nationalists and shows the strength of the Army. Places Austria in a weak position by the Convention of Gastein.</i></p>	
<p><i>2. 1866 and war with Austria – emphasis on the planning, isolating Austria, and the making of peace.</i></p>	
<p><i>3. 1870 and war with France again show the way in which B took advantage of Louis Napoleon's diplomatic isolation and the Hohenzollern candidacy</i></p>	

<p><i>Mistakes of Louis Napoleon 1866 to 1870. Failing to understand B's intentions over Austria and towards uniting Germany. Failing in his ambitious foreign policy, Mexico, Luxembourg, and pushing too hard after the withdrawal of Leopold.</i></p>	
<p><i>Role of Wilhelm, supporting B, Von Roon and Von Moltke, who in turn played an important part in winning B's 3 wars.</i></p>	
<p><b>However</b> economic forces were also important – role of the Zollverein in increasing Prussian strength as Austria became weaker.</p>	
<p><i>Role of economic factors, industrialisation and urbanisation in the development of nationalism</i></p>	
<p><i>Economic and industrial development as well as railways in the success of Prussian armies.</i></p>	
<p><b>Conclusion:</b> <i>Be balanced, B above all had the vision to understand the motives, strengths and weaknesses of the other European states as well as his own vision for Prussia. However he did not create the opportunity but took it.</i></p>	



## **Bismarck, the Prussian Army and the Franco Prussian War**

As in 1866 the war was a demonstration of aspects of Prussian superiority in the preparations and conduct of war. In its aftermath other countries would seek to emulate the professional skills of the General Staff, a trained officer corps, a system of conscription, logistic organisations, effective use of railways and the employment of an effective war of movement. Yet there are aspects of the war that demonstrate the extent to which it was a huge gamble.

### **French Military Superiority?**

Bismarck, according to Wawro could hardly believe his luck as he had not *“anticipated the blundering of the experienced French marshals and the collapse of the French army”*. With their long service experienced soldiers and an army of 400,000 men equipped with the latest chassepot rifle which outranged the now dated Prussian rifles the French were in some respects superior to the huge but conscript Prussian army, 300,000 full time but with conscripts up to 1.2 million.

Yet if Bismarck was doubtful his generals were not as one German officer told a French colleague, *“you may win in the morning but we will win in the evening with our reserves”*. Many observers also noted the poor morale and discipline of the French soldiers in contrast to the fit, educated and indoctrinated German soldiers committed to the national cause.

Moreover Moltke's war planning had diverted spending from fortresses to railways in the hope of being able to deploy Prussia's numerical superiority. French roads, railways and forts were surveyed by Prussian officers to develop a meticulously planned deployment. In contrast French planning was almost non existent. Moreover their tactics were not designed to make the best use of their rifle superiority.

Finally the Prussians had learnt an important lesson from the war with Austria – the need for improved artillery. Most of the Prussian casualties were caused by shell and shrapnel. At Konigratz the Prussians occasionally suffered a bombardment as intense as that experienced in WW1. The solution was new high calibre, breech loading, steel barrelled guns from Krupp, which had three times the accuracy, twice the rate of fire, a third greater range and far greater destructiveness. This was combined with a tactical doctrine that emphasised mobility and flexibility to allow the artillery to blast opposition before the infantry battle began.

Wawro also notes both at the start and during the war the importance of national feelin, patriotism as an element in Prussian morale under the stress of war. A point about the importance of nationalist ideas in the process of unification that is often underrated.

### **The War**

Whatever the efficiencies of the Prussian army and the inherent weaknesses of the French forces, the differences were compounded by political and military errors. Louis Napoleon abandoned the government to Eugenie for the army and the army to Marshal Bazaine, and all three worked at cross purposes.

## **Interpreting the Austro-Prussian War.**

Much has been written emphasising the wisdom of Bismarck, the strategy of von Moltke and the technical superiority of the Prussian army in explaining the victory of Prussia over Austria in 1866. A number of claims have been made which a recent American military historian has challenged and so modified. These claims include:

- that the alliance with Italy showed Bismarck's careful and essential preliminary diplomacy
- that Moltke's envelopment strategy ensured success
- that the Prussian railway network ensured effective logistical support for the Prussian army
- that the breech loading rifle allowed the Prussians to dominate the battlefield
- that Bismarck made a lenient peace with Austria as he foresaw the need to avoid Austrian hostility in the future.

Finally these notes on the military dimension support another interpretation argued by William Carr; that Bismarck had a tendency to gamble to go "*va banque*", to gamble in a crisis. At the very least the analysis of the war shows that it was very much a gamble.

Geoffrey Wawro demonstrates that the key reasons for Austrian and Italian defeat lie within the the governments and institutions of these states and the incompetence of their military leaders. Prussian military virtues are almost secondary or at best successfully take advantage of their enemies' weakness.

## **Prussia, Italy and Austria.**

The obvious virtue of the April 1866 alliance lay in dividing the Austrian army. This alliance is also paradoxical in that Austria had promised the Venetia to France and hence Italy if Austria won a war with Prussia. Italy would gain the Venetia either way. However for the Italians there was also an opportunity to gain the South Tyrol if victory could be gained on the battlefield.

Albrecht in the Venetia had 130,000 men to repel 200,000. Benedek in the the North had 245,000 facing 300,000 Prussians but with the support of 150,000 in the Confederation army. Wawro demonstrates through his analyses of the Custozza campaign that the incompetence of La Marmora, the Italian commander was matched by the failure of Albrecht to properly exploit his victory. Bismarck's diplomacy might have been undermined by a properly exploited Austrian victory which might well have destroyed Italian unity.

*"But for Albrecht's forbearance, Austria might have taken back the Po basin. Francesco Bourbon's brigands, Pope Pius IX's Swiss and Irish guards, and the mafia junta in Sicily,*

*which actually launched a rebellion in November, might have seen to the peninsula and islands.” Page 123*

### **Moltke's Envelopment Strategy – the Kesselschacht.**

Moltke's plan was to divide his forces into 4 army groups: one within Germany to deal with Hanover, the Elbe army to advance through Saxony and first and second armies to attack from Lusatia and Silesia.



The armies were to take advantage of the Prussian railway system and move more rapidly in smaller groups. They would have to advance rapidly after leaving their trains. The Elbe army would have to fight in Saxony while First and Second armies would have to advance through the mountain passes to enter Bohemia. A delay in mobilisation had allowed the Austrians to concentrate their forces at Olmütz. Moltke's intention was to invade Bohemia and surround Benedek's army with his three mobile columns.

He was aware of the risks. Benedek had a reputation for boldness. He would be able to invade Silesia and defeat the Prussian Second Army which would be unsupported by the others. He could also block the exits from the mountains. The Austrians also had the advantage of shorter lines of communication and the ability to manoeuvre between the lines of advance of the Prussian armies.

Thus from the outset Moltke's strategy was extremely risky. It is therefore a mistake to see its subsequent success as inevitable. Much was dependent on chance, and the actions of the Austrians. Moltke acknowledged this "*no plan of operation survives the first clash with an enemy force*".

## **The Prussian Railway Network and Logistical Support**

The Prussian divisions were strung out on a 500 km arc and needed to concentrate wherever the Austrian army chose to move. Speed was essential or else Benedeck could defeat the Prussian armies one by one. Yet Wawro is able to find numerous examples of supply shortages and near fatal delays due to inadequate communications.

In truth once the Prussian armies had reached their unloading points then all depended on the speed of march of men and horses and the flow of supplies. Falkenstein in Hanover and Prince Freidrich Karl in Reichenberg delayed their advance for elaborate and time consuming requisitioning of supplies. Von Bittenfeld's Elbe army was famished having invaded Bohemia on a single road without a supply train and so was forced to stop to requisition. The Prince's army then took 4 days to advance 46 kilometres surprising the even the sluggish Austrian army at their slowness.

There are many more examples including the risky passage of the Nachod gorges into Bohemia from the North where before the battle of Vysokov the Prussian forces got into a terrible tangle of guns, wagon trains and men. In many respects despite the railways there was little different from the Napoleonic wars.

## **The Superiority of the Breech Loading Rifle.**

Time and time again the needle gun proved itself the master of the infantry battle. The Austrians hurled their massed battalions into a hail of fire and took dreadful casualties. The only approach to a solution was attempted at Jicin where the line troops were ordered at one point to just load rifles for a jager battalion which successfully defeated a Prussian advance.

## **The Lenient Peace?**

Moltke's failure to pursue and destroy the Austrian army was not a result of Bismarck's intervention but simply a result of the late arrival of his reserves, and these columns themselves being in chaotic condition.. Moreover the very success of the Prussians had created enormous difficulties of command as units were mixed up and generals scattered.

When the pursuit began Bohemia and Lower Austria were seized and looted but the spread of cholera in the insanitary Prussian camps led to 200 deaths a day and a high command more anxious to make peace than march on Vienna.

## Why did German unification occur in 1870?

